

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2006

Third Prize: Olivia Pham, Sylvester Middle School

One Vision

When he was young, Martin Luther King Jr. had a happy childhood. However, he, like nearly all other African Americans, faced problems of racial discrimination and segregation. His father taught him to stand up for himself but it wasn't until he worked in Connecticut the summer before going to college that he first experienced equal rights. That September, when he was accepted into Morehouse College, he felt a greater feeling of freedom as he was able to talk about segregation and racism more openly.

While working with a racial justice group, he met many whites who supported their cause. His anger towards that race slowly disappeared as he realized that it was possible for people of different races to work together and he felt that he could help greatly. Around the same time, after looking for a career during his first two years of college, two professors at the college who were also ministers influenced him into becoming one too. He was ordained at 18 and became an assistant pastor at the church where his father preached. In 1948 he graduated and enrolled at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania because he felt that he would need a further education to succeed, and he wanted to prove that he was as good as anyone. He was 19 years old at the time, and at this new school he learned of Gandhi. He was impressed with his ideas of nonviolence and began to incorporate them into his own life.

Seven years later on one fateful December day of 1955 marked the beginning of his involvement in the civil rights movement. A day after Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to let a white man take her seat, Martin and many other leaders of the black community planned a boycott. During the process there were many complications. Taxi fares were raised for boycotters, city officials spread lies and rumors about M.L.K. and other African American preachers trying to start a fight within their newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association. On January 30 his house was bombed and in February, the boycott was declared illegal. Many were sent to jail, even Martin himself. but they were all proud in their fight for freedom. Soon, news of the boycott spread across the nation, and Martin Luther King traveled across America giving speeches. And although further complications soon appeared, like the city threatening to fine MIA \$15,000, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation on buses. The boycott lasted 381 days and was successful.

In 1957, he helped form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which financially helped support the nonviolent movement for desegregation among races. Later that same year, because of The Little Rock Nine incident where nine African American students attended an all white school for the first time were bombarded with cruelty and violence until President Eisenhower had soldiers accompany them everyday, it made Dr. King realize how much there was to be done before racial justice could be possible in the South. Because of this, he and the SCLC started Crusade for

Citizenship, which was meant to educate African Americans about voting. In 1958, he published his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. On April 16, 1963, he wrote his famous letter, *Letter from Birmingham Jail* where he spent eleven days during the conflict in Birmingham. He went to jail many times afterwards and a few times before, although in all cases it was because he contributed to the civil rights movements and was following his own path and had never done anything that was actually wrong. And a few months after being arrested in Birmingham, he delivered his famed "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at the Lincoln Memorial to an over 200,000 person audience. He became the youngest person ever to receive a Nobel Peace Prize as he received his in Norway on December 10, 1964, and continued to do good as he tried to get the U.S. to end the Vietnam War, helped the poor in Chicago, started a campaign to stop discrimination in housing, employment and schools in Chicago, and marched with sanitation workers in Memphis. He delivered his last speech on April 3, 1968 before being assassinated at the Lorraine Motel on April 4, 1968.

These are just a few of the steps he took in helping the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout his life he had worked for one goal and one goal only: to make the world we live in a better place. Even at his own risk, he led the Civil Rights Movement and faced hatred, discrimination and unfairness daily. In a way he worked alone, and in many ways he worked with many to be able to achieve the things that he did today. Some had more to do with it than others; some worked behind the scenes while numerous people helped in their own way. Each has a feeling of what peace and justice must feel like, what it must sound, taste and smell like. Each person has their own view of what an oppressionfree world would be like. But they are all working for the same thing, and over time those views have blended and become one vision. What Martin Luther King Jr. worked so hard to achieve is still a work in progress, but he proved that any one person, with a world full of ideas and dreams, and that is followed by people with the same views, can change everything. He has left a legacy for you to follow, and perhaps someday, his dream will become a reality.

Bibliography:

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